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SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: RACING THE CLOCK TO PREPARE FOR KUWAIT'S
JUNE 29 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

REF: A) KUWAIT 1844

B) KUWAIT 1833 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. Summary: Debate over the Amir's May 21 decision to dissolve Parliament is already fading as focus shifts to the June 29 parliamentary elections. Though candidate registration begins officially May 25, many prospective candidates have already launched their campaigns. According to one estimate, spending on the campaigns is expected to reach 100 million KD (approximately \$346 million). Accounting for 57% of the total number of voters, women will have a significant impact on the elections, though few Kuwaitis expect a female candidate to be elected. Many of Kuwait's tribes have started preparing for primaries to choose one representative from the tribe to represent them in the elections. (Note: Though officially prohibited, the Government does not prevent pre-election primaries. End note.) Several political associations from similar ideological currents have begun consultations to coordinate on candidates to support. A liberal columnist made a case for international observers. End summary.

¶2. Only days after the Amir dissolved Parliament (ref B), candidates are already gearing up for the June 29 elections and have begun staking out election headquarters in empty lots, holding meetings with key supporters, and hitting the diwaniya (discussion salon) circuit. The Council of Ministers is expected to begin registration of candidates on May 25. According to Article 24 of the Elections Law, applications for candidacy must be submitted in writing to the electoral constituency's police headquarters within ten days of the start of the registration period. Already numerous public figures have announced their intention to run for the elections, including several women.

Parliamentary Elections Equals Big Business

¶3. The Arabic daily Al-Qabas reported May 23 that "commercial market sources" estimate spending on the upcoming election campaigns to reach a total of 100 million KD (approximately \$346 million) at an average rate of 3 million KD (\$10 million) per day to meet the requirements of advertisements, campaign headquarters, transportation, and other campaign expenses. The sources added that a considerable number of the potential candidates are liquidating their stock portfolios at the Kuwait Stock Exchange in order to ensure sufficient funds to cover their electoral expenses. (Note: Actual data on costs and financing methods are rare. End note.)

Optimism, but Slim Chance for Female Candidates

¶4. According to the most recent electoral rolls, the total number of registered voters in Kuwait is 340,248 (194,910 females and 145,338 males). Most contacts believe the chance of a woman being elected to Parliament is slim, noting that Kuwaiti women do not have adequate time to put together effective campaigns against men who have 44 years of experience. They also argue that local customs and

traditions, such as male-dominated diwanis, favor Kuwaiti men and restrict women's ability to reach wider audiences. Women, who account for 57% of the total number of voters, are nonetheless expected to play an important role in the elections. They are not necessarily going to favor female candidates, and are likely to follow voting patterns related to local interests.

Tribes Entering the Fray with Election Primaries

¶5. Three Kuwaiti tribes published separate ads in the Arabic daily Al-Rai Al-Aam on May 23 inviting would-be tribal candidates to contact that tribe's leadership to arrange for meetings that aim at "coordination and consultation," an indication that the tribes intend to hold primaries to choose one representative from the tribe to represent them in the elections. (Note: According to Article 45 of the Elections Law, tribal and sectarian primaries are prohibited and punishable by a fine and up to three years in prison, however, the Government seldom enforces this law. End note.) In a related development, the Arabic daily Al-Watan reported May 23 that consultations have intensified between some political associations, specifically the Salafi Movement and the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), to coordinate on which candidates will run where, instead of competing to the detriment of both associations.

Liberal Columnist: Why This Election Is Different

¶6. In a May 23 editorial published in Al-Rai Al-Aam, liberal columnist Ahmed Al-Deyain stressed the need to invite international observers to monitor the upcoming parliamentary elections, arguing that this is not interference in Kuwait's domestic affairs. "The June 29 elections will be different from any past elections witnessed by Kuwait" for four reasons, he claimed. First, the political climate surrounding the upcoming elections is different

from any former climate (i.e. there is a popular counter-corruption and pro-reform movement and momentum that crystallized during the tumultuous "We Want Five [electoral constituencies]" rallies). Second, there is a significant amount of political rhetoric that is critical of the ruling regime and anti-corruption and pro-reform, which will necessarily reflect in the campaign themes of many of the candidates. Third, there is tangible popular dissatisfaction and resentment as a result of the steady deterioration of negotiations on electoral reform, ineffective administration, "flagrant governmental maneuvers" against reform, and the prevalence of corruption. Fourth, the participation of women for the first time in parliamentary elections and the significant increase in the size of the electoral base will have a serious and influential impact on the conduct and outcome of parliamentary elections.

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